Straightening an Image

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One of the first things I look for in an image that has a distinct horizon line is to check that the image looks straight. This is especially important for an ocean shot, but is also important for an interior photo.

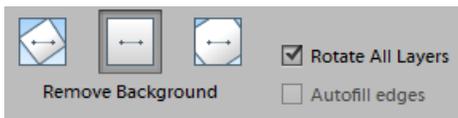As you can see in these two images, my horizon line is dipping to the left.

The fix is slightly different for Elements and CS/CC, but just as quick and easy in either program.

Here's how to do it:

In Photoshop Elements:

We are going to click on the "Straighten Tool" that looks like a level =

When we activate this tool, we have 3 options:

If you click the left icon, it will say "Grow or Shrink"; the middle one says "Remove Background"; and the right one says "Crop to Original Size".

To straighten the photo, we will click with our mouse on the left side of the horizon (it does not have to be at the edge of the photo) – keep holding the left mouse button and bring your cursor towards a point on the right edge of the horizon – then let go. This is telling the program what line you want it to make straight:

If we use the Grow or Shrink icon, and we straighten our horizon, we get this result - our horizon is now straight, but we have the excess white canvas showing in all of the corners. We can manually crop this ourselves, but there's a quicker way!

If instead we use the center icon, Remove Background, Elements will crop our image just enough to get rid of those white edges.

This is the one I use 99% of the time!

In Photoshop CC:

You can straighten an image at the same time that you crop it in PS CC.

Click on the Crop Tool to activate. Once you have the tool active, click on the "Straighten" command on the top tool bar. You can then click on a point towards the left side of your horizon, keep holding that mouse button and drag across to a point towards the right of your horizon and then let go. Photoshop will straighten the image and then you can finish cropping as desired. Click the check mark on the top tool bar to accept the change.

Once I "straighten" the image, a grid will appear that will let you finish cropping your image as desired.

When you accept the change the image will physically rotate to the straightened position.

Hazel is involved with the photographic community on local, regional and national levels, and is an officer in several organizations. In 2008 she received an honors distinction of Master Member of NECCC; in 2013 she was awarded the distinction of APSA from the Photographic Society of America. She has been teaching at photo clubs and conferences as well as her own seminars and workshops since 2006. She welcomes questions and feedback from her students and is pleased to share in your photographic journey.